

# How Artwork is Interpreted as a Function of Gender of the Artist

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## Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to examine how men and women show similarities and differences in how they interpret works of art when the artwork is attributed to a male or female artist.

Earlier research suggests that when adults view artwork attributed to a male, they value that artwork higher in terms of quality, aesthetics, importance, and monetary values than if they believe the artwork was produced by a female. The set of paintings which were judged consisted of both abstract and modern paintings and drawings from the mid-20th century.

## Method

Participants were 17 undergraduate students recruited from psychology classes at a medium sized university in the Southeastern United States. There were 7 men and 10 women. Most participants self-identified as Caucasian-American (47%) and African-American (41%). The average age of participants was 20.5 years old ( $SD = 1.42$ ).

Participants were recruited in class and asked to rate a set of five slides of

paintings and drawings by mid 20<sup>th</sup> century modern abstract artists. The artwork was displayed to groups of students who rated each on emotion evoked, quality, importance to the art world, and monetary value. An example of the paintings is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. An example painting used for practice in the study by Morris Louis, titled: *Alpha-Phi*, 1961

## Results

The ratings for the five paintings and drawings were summed for analysis with a maximum score of 35. As shown in Figure 2, the main manipulation of whether the artwork was produced by a male or female showed no significant differences ( $p > .06$ ) for the major variables of quality, importance to the art world, importance to society, and monetary worth.

Rating of artwork by artist gender

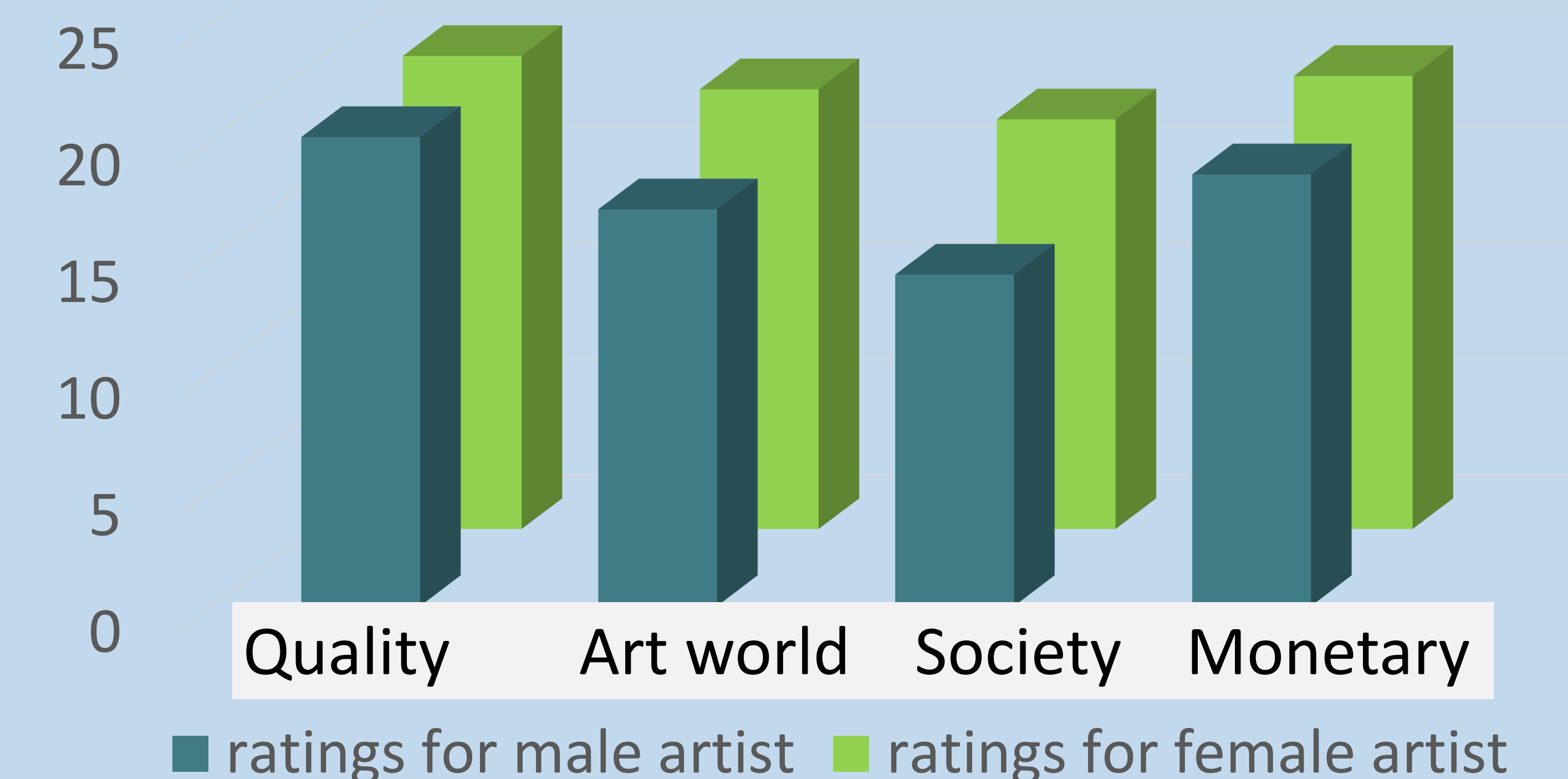


Figure 2: Ratings of artwork attributed to a man or a woman for four domains

Some ratings were related to gender of the rater. Men had higher overall ratings for the paintings for quality of painting ( $r(15) = .49, p = .046$ ) and for monetary value ( $r(15) = .52, p = .034$ ), regardless of the gender of who was attributed as the actual artist.

## Discussion

There are a number of limitations for this study. The most important limitation was that data collection was stopped due to the shutting down of campus due to Covid-19 pandemic. This meant only a small number of people could be assessed. Second, only one artist of each gender was assessed. A more robust study would include multiple artists and a larger variety of their work.